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ABSTRACT

Researchers analyzed 500 never-before-analyzed interviews from a study conducted by Norbert Elias and other researchers at University of Leicester in 1962, which was one of the first studies of the transition from school to work. The Elias study explored how young people in England experienced work and adjusted their lives to the work role. All of the interviews analyzed were from males, most of whom were aged 15 and in their first jobs. About 100 were from males 16 or older, and 12 of the interviewees were in at least their fourth job. The data suggest that the workers' pre-work home and school experiences were important in their expectations and experiences of work. For the majority, school was largely negative and most wanted to leave, despite having low and negative expectations of work. Earning money was a key dimension of work, although the extent to which the young workers realized their desires to earn and spend money depended a great deal on the household allocation of resources. The data suggest that young people in the 1960s had concerns similar to present day youths' about the school to work transition. (The paper also reviews two other 1960s studies of school to work transition and contains 36 references.) (SLR)

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'I couldn't wait for the day': Young Workers' Reflections on Education during the Transition to Work in the 1960s

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Abstract

The school and labour market experiences of young workers are a major concern for both academics and policy makers alike. This concern has generated a great deal of research reflecting a wide range of debates around the transition from school to work. One of the first research projects to consider this process was undertaken in the early 1960s by researchers at the University of Leicester, led by Norbert Elias. The data was collected via interviews and whilst 910 interviews were completed, the data was not fully analysed or published. Recently, 866 of the interview schedules have been discovered and an initial analysis suggests that the data provides a significant insight into the transition from education to work in the 1960s. This paper aims to present some of this data for the first time, exploring young workers' reflections on education and their transitions to work and adulthood.

1. Introduction

The process through which young people make the transition from school to work has been a focus for youth studies and the sociology of youth since the early 1960s. Indeed, some of the early works on youth tended to focus almost exclusively on the transition process (see for example Wilson 1957; Carter 1962, 1963, 1969; Douglas 1964; Watts 1967). However, despite the early focus on youth transitions such studies remained fairly scarce. It was not until the early to mid-1970s, when youth unemployment and the decreasing employment opportunities for young people became issues, that more attention was given to the problem of youth (both in terms of transitions and more generally) (see Blackler 1970; Morrison and MacIntyre 1971; Bazalgette 1975; Ashton and Field 1976). During the 1970s the larger companies either stopped employing large numbers of school-leavers or became involved with government youth training schemes (Fuller and Unwin 1998). The research focus at this time shifted to issues around the growth of youth unemployment and the impact of the associated government training schemes. As Roberts (1995:23) has highlighted '...the scarcer young people's employment opportunities have become the more attention has been paid to their preparation and eventual entry into the labour market'. However, such issues have perhaps led to an over-concentration of transitions. Indeed, in more recent times the over-concentration on youth transitions has led Cohen and Ainley (2000) to suggest that

> The youth as transition approach not only implies a linear teleological model of psychological development, it is premised upon the availability of waged labour as the 'ultimate goal'. The consequent emphasis on production has led to a limited research paradigm focused on 'transition' as a rite of passage between the states of psychological maturity and immaturity...
>
> (Cohen and Ainley, 2000: 80)

However, despite Cohen and Ainley's (2000) welcome assertion that youth studies should move beyond the traditional 'narrow empiricism' of youth transitions and look to the new generation of empirical studies that explore youth as a complex mix of social, psychological, economic, cultural and political processes, the interest in youth transitions *per se* remains both in terms of explorations of current transitions (Ahier *et al* 2000; Johnston *et al* 2000; Canny 2001; Kelly and Kenway 2001; Ryan 2001) of 'historical' or past transitions (Fuller and Unwin 2001; Vickerstaff 2001) or generational differences

(Strathdee 2001). Indeed the value of such historical accounts of transition is emphasised by Vickerstaff (2001) who suggests that by looking back at the transition process it becomes possible to question the orthodoxy of the early (and current) accounts. For example, Vickerstaff argues that many of the earlier studies on youth transitions were based on the assumption that the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s were a 'golden age' where transition from school to work was simple, linear and 'single step'. However by interviewing respondents who were apprentices between 1940 and 1980 she has been able to demonstrate that transitions were anything but comfortable or unproblematic (Vickerstaff 2001: 3). Likewise, Fuller and Unwin (2001), via an analysis of narratives from past apprentices, have explored the role that the transition to apprenticeship played in the formation of occupational identity and demonstrated how this had implications for community identity in a way the Modern Apprenticeship never will.

The value of studies such as Fuller and Unwin (2001) and Vickerstaff (2001) resides in the fact that they are able to explore contemporary debates and test received wisdom on transitions by getting their respondents to reflect on past work experiences. Obviously such approaches are not without limitations, such as the problem of memory and the notion that the past always looks 'rosier'. However, it is our assertion here that it is still possible to learn so much about the transition process by re-examining data from long completed projects or from life and work narratives. The luxury of time also allows us to re-explore this data mindful of the concerns of authors such as Cohen and Ainley (2000).

The remainder of this paper is organised into four sections. After the introduction a brief discussion of two important texts is offered, Carter (1962) and Ashton and Field (1976). In these texts particular attention is paid to the way they explored and accounted for their respondents' attitudes to and experiences of school and the respondents' perceptions and expectations of paid employment. In the next section, using data from 500 respondents from the little known '*Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles*' project carried out at the University of Leicester in the early 1960s, we re-examine elements of the transition from school to work process. We aim to explore young workers' reflections on education before moving on to re-analyse some of the data relating the individuals' perceptions and expectations of paid employment. We also reflect briefly on the respondents' views on what it meant to be an adult. In the final section we draw some conclusions and reflect on possible implications for contemporary debates.

2. Themes and Debates

As suggested above, there were a number of key texts from the mid to late 1960s which explored the transition from school to work (although relatively it was still an under researched area at that time). We wanted to explore our data in terms of the themes and issues that were being presented as important at the time. Carter (1963) produced one of the early definitive works on school to work transition as part of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (D.S.I.R) sponsored project '*Home, School and Work*'. Carter (1963) carried out interviews with 100 boys and 100 girls who left secondary modern schools in Sheffield at Easter and Midsummer 1959. Each respondent was interviewed three times at various stages of the transition process. From these interviews Carter (1963) was able to reflect on and explore a number of research areas including attitudes towards school and the early experiences of work. One of the other few pieces of research into the school to work transition during the 1960s and 1970s was the key publication '*Young Workers: The Transition From School to Work*' by Ashton and Field (1976). Using data on youth transitions in Leicester, the Ashton and Field (1976) text is significant in terms of the overall aims of this project as it actually supplemented data collected in the 1970s with a small number of the interviews from the Norbert Elias led '*Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles*' project used here (see below). As such their data says as much about youth transitions in the 1960s as it does the 1970s.

Carter 1963

In terms of attitudes to school and leaving school, Carter (1963) provides a rich and detailed discussion, clearly documenting the young people's school experience. For example, according to Carter (1963) over half the boys and girls in the research liked school and some enjoyed it a great deal suggesting that it was an alternative to the boredom of home. The remainder of respondents reportedly held mixed feelings about school with some attending only because it was compulsory. Carter (1963) reports that many children spent a considerable amount of time at school in a 'state of boredom', although some of the children found the lessons enjoyable and thought education was a good thing (Carter 1963: 21). Some children in this study felt that they were being held back and that the lessons were too simple or that there was not enough for the children to do. However, he argues that irrespective of the children's attitudes towards, or experiences of school.

> ...the majority of children were looking forward, some already with great excitement, to starting work. Three-quarters of the boys and girls were glad they would soon be a worker – independent, recognised as grown-up, no longer school kids.
>
> (Carter 1963: 23)

Despite the majority of those in Carter's (1963) study being keen to start work, there were those who were apprehensive and anxious about the world beyond school. However, regardless of their initial feelings and whilst the majority were not 'shocked' by the transition process, one year after leaving school most of the children 'had discovered that work was not all that it was cracked up to be: but the status of the worker...was no less cherished' (Carter 1963: 23). Carter (1963) also reports that work was not quite what the children had expected. Although it was still largely boring, the employers were less strict than the teachers and, Carter (1963) argues, work gave the children dignity and freedom not available at school. According to Carter (1963)

> One aspect which impressed many children was the free atmosphere at work. People could walk about and talk, and chew and sing and smoke...Unofficial privileges and tolerance in such matters as time for clocking in and the length of tea breaks were a pleasant surprise to children who recalled warnings about the toughness of the world of work.
>
> (Carter 1963: 93)

However, some of the earlier expectations about work, in particular the expectations that it would make the children more adult were not always realised and he argued that adjustment to work was made more problematic by the insignificance and marginal nature of some of the children's work roles. As an example, Carter (1963) cites shop assistants who were made to feel insignificant as they were not allowed to do anything alone and when giving change they had to check first with the supervisor. Although still perceived as children, some of the respondents did feel older and that there had been changes to their lives, but as Carter (1963) points out just as many still persisted in children's leisure pursuits.

Another defining feature of adulthood, which the children in this study looked forward to, was the independence that earning money would provide. As Carter (1963) suggests, 'the wage was valued not just for what it enabled children to do, but for what it enabled them to be' (Carter 1963: 97). However, the experiences of earning money were also less clear cut and for many, spending and the associated freedoms that spending (and earning) might give did not materialise in a way that was expected. In Carter's (1963) study the earnings that

the young people obtained were, by and large, administered by their mothers and it was the mothers who decided how much 'spending money' the young workers were allowed. Although earning the money did provide some independence most had to plan their spending with great care.

Ashton and Field 1976

One of the definitive studies of youth transitions from the 1960s and 1970s was provided by Ashton and Field (1976). In their research on youth transitions in Leicester, Ashton & Field (1976) identified the three groups, central to understanding the transition process, as the Careerless, the Short-term Careers and the Extended Careers. They suggest that the three categories identify the different meanings attached to work by the young workers, reflecting their different experiences and self-image. For example, the careerless make the transition from the lower streams of state schools into semi-skilled and unskilled work without adjustment problems. Their concern was for the immediate present and little thought was given to the future (Ashton & Field 1976:36). They were employed in jobs that provided good short-term economic rewards but little chance of self-development. They frequently changed jobs, as both the boredom threshold and commitment to the job were low. This group learnt to believe that they had limited ability at school and as such did not consider themselves to be suited to jobs requiring lengthy training.

In contrast, those with short-term careers were moderately successful at school, occupying a middle position between the careerless and the extended careers. On leaving school they went on to seek jobs in the skilled manual trades, technical occupations and clerical work. These jobs offered the possibility of development through training and also a degree of security, illustrating their greater concern with the future. When they began work they faced a lengthy period of training and/or further education often paid for by the employers. This group learnt complex job specific skills and tended to stay in the job until training was complete. They became 'locked into' the occupation and rarely envisaged a change in career once the skills were learnt. This group according to Ashton and Field, believed themselves to be of moderate intelligence and capable of further development. They chose jobs that provided them with the opportunity to 'make something of themselves'.

The third group identified as 'extended careers' generally had more middle-class backgrounds. At school they had been aware of the link between academic success and entry to a good career. Their focus was more on long-term rewards and their career paths, which offered continuous advancement and high and secure incomes, reflected this. Like

the short-term careers, their pay was low on entering work and promotion depended upon further education and training. This group saw continuity between education and work and often had on-the-job training in addition to day release schemes. Their self-image was as intelligent individuals capable of considerable self-development. As such they embarked upon careers that required a long period of learning in order to progress and develop their potential skills. The long-term rewards were considerably greater for this group.

In each case, Ashton and Field argue that the positive or negative image the young workers acquired of themselves within the family was then reinforced at school. Their entry into work and early experience of it further reinforced the self-image and orientation to work generated at home and in school. Findings from later studies reached similar conclusions to those of Ashton and Field, stressing the impact of social class background on the school to work transition (Brown 1987; Furlong 1992; Furlong, and Cartmel 1997; Jenkins 1983; Willis 1977) and the ease with which young people managed the transition (Kiernan 1992; Bynner 1998).

Overall, the Carter (1963) and the Ashton and Field (1976) texts highlight a number of different themes. First, that the experiences of school and family life had an impact on young people's expectations of work. Second, that whilst school was largely boring it did provide some diversion from the 'greater' boredom of home life. Third, the majority of young people in both studies looked forward to leaving school and did not experience transition problems. However, work was not what they expected it to be. Fourth, many still identified with their childhood roles and leisure pursuits. Finally, although earning money was important, the young workers still appeared to be dependant on the home and had little of their own money to spend on themselves.

3. Background and Methodology

The data for this paper is taken from a research project on the transition from school to work carried out by a team of researchers, led by Norbert Elias, at the University of Leicester in the early 1960s. The original research project was awarded a grant for £15,000 by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (D.S.I.R) in 1962. The aim of this little known *'Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles'* project was to explore how young people experienced work and adjusted their lives to the work role. Suggesting that much of the early research on young people was essentially 'adult

centred', with adults trying to apply their norms and values to young people, Elias stated that this project was

> ...concerned with the problems which young male and female workers encounter during their adjustment to their work situation and their entry into the world of adults. When they go to work, or begin to train for work, young workers have to make a wider adjustment to a situation and to roles which are new to them, whose implications are often imperfectly understood by them and by the adults concerned, and for which they are in many cases not too well prepared. The project will differ from other studies in investigating this wider adjustment which young workers have to make in their relationships with older workers and supervisors in the factory or workshop; to the problems and to their role as workers; and to their roles as money earners in home relations and in their leisure time. The factors to be examined will include differences between age groups, between sexes, in size of organisation, in nature and status of job, and between young workers from working class and middle class home backgrounds. We intend to pay special attention to the overall characteristics of industrial societies responsible for the specific problems of adjustment for people in this age group.
>
> (Young Worker Project, Minutes of Fifth Meeting 18 April 1962, p2)

From this position emerged five specific areas of enquiry – adjustment to relationships with older workers and supervisors; adjustment to job problems; adjustment to role as workers; adjustment to role as 'money-earner' in home relations; and adjustment to role as 'money-earner' in leisure time. The data was to be collected via interviews with a sample of young people drawn from the Youth Employment Office index of all Leicester school-leavers from the summer and Christmas of 1960 and the summer and Christmas of 1962. The target group was to include all those with one years further education. This sample was then further stratified by the school attended (secondary, technical, grammar or other), by the size of firm entered in first job and whether they were trainees or not. The sample was divided up into five sub-groups and using a table of random numbers a target sample of 1150 young people were identified. The sub-groups were 'A' – boys who had left school in summer or Christmas 1962, with less than one year's further education (target sample of 330); 'B' – boys who had left school in summer or Christmas 1962, with more than one years further education (target sample of 160); 'C' – boys who had left school in summer or Christmas 1960, with less than one year's further education (target sample of 300); 'D' - girls who had left school in summer or Christmas 1962, with less than one years further education (target sample of 200); and finally 'E' - girls who had left school in summer or Christmas 1960, with less than one year's further education (target sample of 160). From

the 1150 individuals, the research team were successful in contacting 987 of which 105 refused to be interviewed and 882 interviews were completed. The interview schedule was semi-structured but the responses tended to be open-ended, textual and reflective in nature. It contained a series of 82 questions in five sections (including Work, Family and Expenditure, Leisure, School and Work, and General). The interviewers were asked to write all answers to questions verbatim if possible and always in as full detail as the time and circumstances allowed. The interviewer was also asked to make a series of general comments at the end of the interview schedule giving the interviewers general impression from the interview, noting any problems connected with work, family or leisure. The fieldwork began in 1962 and ended in 1964.

At the start of the research in 1962 the researchers involved with the project were unaware that Elias had arranged to take up a Chair in Sociology at the University of Ghana from the October of that year. Although Elias attempted to direct the project remotely via a research committee, problems with working practice, academic direction and the researchers' 'right' to publish emerged. By the time the fieldwork had ended, and 882 interviews plus a pilot study of 32 interviews had been completed, the research team had resigned and the project effectively ended. With the exception of Ashton and Field (1976) who used a sample of the cases, the bulk of the data was never analysed or published. In the mid-1970s Ashton archived the data, where it has remained untouched until recently when 866 of the original interview schedules were rediscovered. The value of this data for re-analysis is well made by Corti *et al* (1995)

> ...although huge resources have been devoted to qualitative interview, ethnographic, case and anthropological studies, the data are often inaccessible, untraceable or have been destroyed.
>
> (Corti, Foster and Thompson 1995: 1)

From the transcription and initial analysis of some of the data, what becomes clear is that this project provides a fascinating insight into the qualitative experiences of the way young people experienced the transition from school to work in the 1960s. The research findings presented here are based on 500 of the original 866 interviews schedules. All of the interviews analysed to date were males, the majority of whom were aged 15 and who were in their first jobs. Around a hundred of the males were sixteen or over and twelve of the young workers were on their fourth or more job.

4. Initial Findings and Themes

The analysis of the data will focus on three, key emergent themes. Firstly, we present data on the young workers' reflections on their experience of education, their perceptions of school since leaving and the reasons why they chose to leave school as soon as they were able. The paper moves on to examine the young workers' reflections on what they had thought work would be like before they entered the labour market and then what the actual experience of work was, once employment commenced. Finally, the paper examines the process of becoming an adult.

Young Workers Reflections on Education

Within the interview schedule a series of questions asked the young workers to reflect on their decision to leave school. In contrast to Carter's (1963) sample, this group appeared not to have enjoyed school and as the quotes below suggest, the majority had been keen to leave school:

> *...it was the best day of my life when I left school...*

> *...I were dying to leave the place. I were utterly fed up with it...*

For many of them the authority of school was something they could not wait to 'escape', they commented that they felt 'trapped' by school and many of the comments used prison analogies to describe how they felt about school:

> *...I was thrilled at the prospect actually, the end of my sentence...*

> *...I was dead happy, I hated school, being told to shut up every lesson, having to call people sir, not allowed to smoke...*

As mentioned previously, the children in Carter's (1963) study were looking forward to starting work and moving towards adulthood and independence. Similarly, for our group, a key reason why leaving school was seen as an attractive option was because employment offered them the chance to earn their own money and was a step towards living independently. The decision to leave school was also influenced by friends who had already left school and respondents frequently expressed a desire to '...be like their friends'.

...I wanted to stand on my own two feet and begin to look after myself, earn my own keep...

...I wanted to get to work to be like the rest of my friends ... they start talking about work and you feel left out...

Clearly, however, as in Carter's research, there were also respondents who expressed anxiety at the thought of leaving school and entering the real world.

...I was a bit apprehensive, I had heard so many things about the big world, that it was harder than school...

...a bit nervous, not knowing what job would be like...

Following on from this question the respondents were asked if now, as young workers, they wished they had stayed longer at school. For the majority, some 67 per cent, the response was negative. They were happy to have left school, again primarily because this had afforded them the opportunity to earn their own money.

...I do sometimes but I'd sooner be at work earning my own money...

As this quote illustrates there was an element of contradiction here for although many were happy to be earning their own money there was a perceptible sense of regret at leaving school. This centred on the feeling that on entering the labour market they had lost their freedom and they already felt nostalgic about the shorter school days, the school holidays and the breaks. It appears that even after a short time at work there was a realisation that work was harder than school and that in retrospect their school lives had been 'easy lives'.

...not really ...mind you miss school holidays, short hours, long dinner hours...

...I was fed up to the teeth with school but thinking about it now it's a lot easier than work...

...when you're at school you don't but when you're at work you realise it...

...I just regret leaving school. I realise now we had a pretty easy time. We weren't hard done by...

Whilst work was generally a better experience than had been anticipated a number of the respondents had realised, in retrospect, that their time at school had been very easy;

...I didn't know I was going to get nine '0' levels and I think I could have done fairly well at 'A' levels. I was fed up to the teeth with school but thinking about it now its a lot easier than work...

...I liked it there, the hours were shorter and so you had more time to do other things...

Others had realised that if they had stayed on at school to gain more qualifications then their future career would have held more promise,

...School is better than work. I could have learnt more and got a better job...

...I couldn't stay any longer you had to leave at 15. If I'd had the chance I should have stayed - think I'd have benefited in the long run...

...when I consider that people who got A levels get more money than I do. Would have liked to have done A levels again, I failed first time...

...it would have given me a better chance - given me a better start if I had done A levels...

As Willis (1977:107) comments '...ironically as the shop floor becomes a prison, education is seen retrospectively and hopelessly as the only escape'. This was certainly true for these respondents who explained that it was only once they were at work that they realised those who had worked hard at school and stayed on to take more qualifications were those who now had more successful and better paid careers.

However, the decision to leave had been made a long time earlier and had been informed by experiences both at home and at school. In reflecting upon their decision to leave school, one year after leaving, it emerges that many of this group had not considered staying on at school. As the quotes below illustrate the main reason for this was because they did not perceive themselves as being intelligent enough to continue their education.

...I wasn't brainy or anything like that, it wasn't worth me staying on...

...I have nothing against school, if I had been taking G.C.E. I would have stayed but in my case it would have been a waste

...I don't think that there is any point unless you know that you are intelligent and can go to university...

The data indicates that in deciding to leave school and enter employment '...young people are seen to place themselves firmly on one side of the English education system's academic/vocational divide' (Unwin and Wellington, 2001:31). In fact the decision of which path to take is often decided at a far earlier stage in the school career and is informed by teachers and reinforced by parental expectations and young people's experience at school. As Ashton and Field (1976) have argued, the positive or negative image the young workers acquire of themselves, first within the family, is later reinforced at school. Many pupils are seen as 'non-academic' from a young age and therefore have low expectations because they believe they are 'failures' in terms of school and see academic work as being irrelevant to their lives ahead. This view is largely formed from comments made by teachers that indeed staying on would be a waste of time for certain groups of school children.

Individual Perceptions and Expectations of Paid Employment

Having asked the respondents to reflect upon their experience of school, the interview schedule moved on to examine the young workers' preconceived ideas about working life and their subsequent experience of work. Firstly, they were asked what they had thought work would be like. As the quotes below illustrate, although these respondents had been keen to leave school they were under no illusion about the reality of work and largely felt that it would be a bad experience. Whilst prison analogies had been used to describe the experience of school, work was compared to 'slavery'.

...I thought it would be ghastly, working continuously without a break, without being able to talk to anyone, that's what I thought it would be...

...a bit like school, very strict and worked like slaves...

...start in the morning and slave right through...

There was also an expectation or fear that like school, the workplace would be hierarchically structured and that the young worker would be at the bottom of this

hierarchy. Their main concerns had been, for example, a fear of being 'told off', not being allowed to talk to workmates and being watched over constantly.

...expected everyone would be shouting at you...

...I thought you'd get told off if you did anything wrong...

As Willis (1977) explains, for some young workers employment was viewed as a route to earning money and it was expected that it would be unpleasant. Whilst this might be expected to deter the boys from leaving school this was not the case. Work was seen as an important life change to be looked forward to. They wanted to escape from school and however terrible the alternative appeared to be, '...the prospect of money and the cultural membership amongst real men beckons very seductively...' (Willis, 1976:100).

What was work actually like?

In fact, like Carter's (1963) sample, the majority of these school-leavers were pleasantly surprised by their early experiences of work. They found that overall it was very different to school life and in general a more positive experience than school had been perhaps because of the 'dignity and freedom' (Carter, 1963) the young workers were given. For example, the workplace was found not to be strict or monitored and there was a lack of discipline compared to school. The work itself was easier than expected and the young workers found that they were treated as adults, able to work at their own pace and allowed to stop and talk to their colleagues. In this respect work was also less restrictive than had been feared and the older, established workers were friendlier than had been anticipated.

...It was much easier. They didn't stand over you watching everything you did like I thought they would...

...I expected someone to be sitting by me telling me what to do and to get on with it but it wasn't like that, it was much more free...

...Everyone friendly - if you did anything wrong you would be told but not told off...

...everybody just talking to each other and if you want a word with each other just switch machines off, put tools down and go and have a chat...

What also emerges is that there were high levels of occupational mobility amongst the group, particularly those categorised as 'careerless' by Ashton and Field (1976). If a

young worker was not happy with the job he had taken there was no reason or need to stay. It was relatively easy to find alternative employment which offered more money or preferable work conditions.

Transition to adulthood

For most of these respondents, like those in Carter's (1963) sample, the idea of starting work was welcome, although some did express their fears about this life change. This fear focused on the prospect of entering the 'real world' and being 'amongst real men'. Work was seen as part of the adult world to which they did not yet belong and which they did not understand and they believed it to be frightening and unfriendly. Although Pilcher (1996) sees the transition to work as also being a transition to adulthood, these young workers were very aware that they were entering an adult world to which they did not yet belong, '...going into a factory with grown ups ... you'd feel like the odd one out...'. Even amongst the more 'confident' respondents there was a sense of uncertainty about the world they were entering. Clearly these respondents positioned themselves firmly as young workers, rather than adults, and they did not yet see themselves as being on the same level as the established workers.

The boys themselves were very clear in their thoughts as to what would symbolise their own transition to adulthood, citing characteristics such as 'not playing out', 'learning a trade' and 'having responsibilities' as being adult.:

> *..it's the way he behaves. Not shouting and gallivanting about. When he settles down and just behaves like an adult. But when they are walking about the streets and hanging around street corners- it's like being a 'teddy boy', but if you can go somewhere properly and not act daft like kids do, I think that's when you've become an adult*
>
> *...the realisation you have got to work for a living, you can't mess about like you did at school. Mixing with adults all the day, you see the way they behave and you copy them.*
>
> *lot of things, learning not to be took in - learning you're trade - and when you've learnt your traded you're an adult*

Many of the boys also believed that older workers, due to their higher levels of responsibility should be paid more than younger workers even if they were doing the same

job. They cited factors such as experience and knowledge, 'responsibility' and 'family circumstances' as reasons why a higher level of pay was justified.

...no, because the adult knows more and perhaps has got more responsibility, wife and kids...

...not really because the adult that knows the most usually does more than the youngster, like me dad he does more than me sometimes...

...no, because I don't think an adult and a boy can do the same...

Further to this it seems that the young workers' idealisation of earning their own money and becoming independent was often not realised. Like the children in Carter's research, earning money did not symbolise the freedom to spend that money as they wished. When asked what happened to their wages, the data reveals that far from being domestically and financially independent fewer than half the respondents kept the money themselves (47%). Many had to pass their wage packet to their mother (45%) or to share it equally with her (5.5%) or, for a small number, give it to their father (2.5%). Their parents would then allocate money for the young workers to spend on themselves. Once they had their own 'allocated' income, their patterns of consumption also identified the young workers as not yet being adult. For many their own money was not spent on the pursuit of an independent life style but on 'sweets' or 'going out' and buying clothes, records and cigarettes.

The respondents, then, saw adults as those who had responsibilities and behaved differently to themselves. To them adults were more experienced and learned and not 'with it'. They saw themselves as boys in all life contexts, for example, at work their colleagues were 'men', at home they still 'played out' and some still received pocket money. The money that they had was spent on sweets, going out and not on responsibilities. Indeed, as the quotes below illustrate, the boys were under no illusion that they were not yet adults:

...not particularly - not yet. I like to have a bit of fun now and again. They don't mess about. Like me mate- when we were down his house we'd have a fight for a bit of fun

...no - an adult has more experience with other people and more knowledge of how to deal with them...

...no, far from it, I don't want to become old - if you know what I mean - I want to be always with it - if you know what I mean...

...not at the present - you have still got plenty of things to learn really...

5. Conclusions

Although the data presented here really only touches upon the themes discussed, and despite the fact that we have not really been able to fully reflect the depth of the data we have in this paper, a few tentative conclusions can be drawn. The data suggests that the young workers' pre-work experiences of school and home were important in their expectations and experiences of work. For the majority school was a largely negative experience and they were keen to leave even though they had low and negative expectations of work. However, as Carter (1963) reports, these pre-work expectations were largely unfounded. Earning money was one of the key dimensions of work, although as suggested above the extent to which the young workers realised their desires to earn and spend money depended a great deal on the household allocation of resources.

However, one of the main issues that has to be dealt with when using such historical data are the notions of *so what* or *does this add anything to what we already know*? Such questions can be dealt with on a number of levels. First, the use of historical data is useful in that it allows the possibility of re-testing or a re-examination of debates from the time that the data was collected. Second, it allows the researcher to re-examine data in the light of contemporary debates. For example, this data contributes to the debate on the transition to adulthood yet this aspect of the data was not written up when it was collected. However, as suggested above, authors such as Pilcher (1996) argue that the transition from school to work is a part of the transition to adulthood. The data presented here suggests that such an assertion is problematic and that entering work at 15 or 16 the young workers were (and perhaps still are) children in many ways. This issue raises a number of questions for us centred around the ongoing discussion as to when adulthood begins and childhood ends. It could be argued that merely entering work does not mark the one single step that young people take towards adulthood as once thought. Likewise, Canny (2001) argues that the boundary between workplace and education has become blurred. From an analysis of this data we can see that historically there was a clear division between school and work for these young workers. One can only speculate as to the attitudes of this group towards

education now, however this may have implications for current older workers and their view on contemporary debates such as lifelong learning.

One of the key themes that has emerged in past works on youth transitions is the assertion that somehow the entry to work in the past was simpler (Vickerstaff 2001) and that the transition from school to work has only become problematic since the availability of work for young people has decreased. However, the data presented above suggests that young people in the 1960s had very similar concerns about making the transition from school to work and that for many the process was (whilst not as bad as they thought) not always an easy transition to make.

Finally, as suggested above, reflections on the 'past' are being used in current research (Fuller and Unwin 2001 and Vickerstaff 2001) but this has limitations. The use of historical data or the re-analysis of data collected at the time in question may provide a more accurate picture of events of the time.

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